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If you've just brought home your first Irish wolfhound puppy — or if you're about to— congratulations! You're in the wolfhound life now. Odds are, if this one doesn't kill or cripple you, you'll get another. And another after that. Because Irish wolfhounds get under your skin and into your soul like no other dog.

### **This Is Not Idle Talk.**

Ask any wolfhound owner. They'll not only whip out photos of their hound that they just happened to have on them, they'll talk as long as you'll listen. And you'll notice they have a certain gleam in their eye. They're passionately committed to the breed.

And why not? Once, only kings and their court could legally own a wolfhound. They were the war dogs of the ancient Celts. Wars were fought over them. Ancient Rome went wild when they showed up. They are the world's largest sighthound and the stuff of legend still courses through their veins.

Yes, that little fuzzy-headed puppy you just rode home with will be a giant six months from now, and not just any giant. Wolfhounds are wicked smart, they can be stubborn as a rock and they'll be the center of your life from now on. They'll insist on it.

But you've never been loved until a wolfhound loves you. And they'll bring out the very best in you returning that love as you strive to give them the best life possible. Literally, a wolfhound will change your life.

### **The Clock Is Ticking.**

If you have a reputable breeder, they'll be standing by to help with tips on nutrition, health, the correct amount of exercise and much more. But you may not know about the 16-week mark. You have

that long to begin your puppy's socialization before a developmental window closes. It's critical to expose your puppy to an array of sights and sounds now before that window closes.

Think of your hound's ability to fit into our world as a muscle. That muscle is *created* during those first 16 weeks. You'll regularly socialize your wolfhound after that, but if the muscle isn't there, it'll be harder to persuade them to try new things and go to new places.

The trouble is, your puppy isn't fully protected by immunization shots yet. So avoid other dogs, dog parks and places where other dogs hang out while you do the beginning socialization.

The goal is for your puppy to meet at least 100 different people those first 16 weeks. Elderly people, children, different ethnic groups, people in hats, people wearing eyeglasses... and each meet-and-greet should be a positive, pleasurable experience for the puppy. I always carry cheese and encourage people I meet to feed the puppy a pinch. This makes friends fast.

Be sure your puppy walks on a variety of surfaces, too. Sand, mud, gravel, linoleum floors, wooden floors, concrete, stone paths — anything they're likely to encounter later on in your daily walks. Never force your puppy. Always encourage and praise plentifully. Your puppy is learning to trust you and bond during this crucial period.

Pay attention to sounds. These are your puppy's first days in your world. He needs to hear cars and motorcycles, sirens, doors slamming and plastic sheets snapping in the wind. They'll learn to calmly accept odd sounds if you are there, confidently and reassuringly beside them.

Your breeder has likely already started the socialization process before you take your puppy home. But cover every sight and sound

you can think of just in case because your local environment may have special features that weren't present at the breeders.

### **“Fra Gilly” — It Must be Italian.**

Watching them bound around, you may not realize how [fragile](#) your Irish wolfhound puppy actually is. But if you saw an X-ray of your puppy's bones, you'd be alarmed. They don't meet in many places. Your baby is tearing around like crazy on a skeletal frame held together in many key places by just muscle and tendons. Those bones won't grow together until they're at least 13 months old.

And your little whirlwind will be growing and packing on weight day by day. Yet, they need exercise to develop muscles to carry that mighty frame. It's tricky business getting a wolfhound puppy through that first year without injury.

You'll want to walk them regularly for socialization, but also to build muscle and stamina. The rule of thumb is walk them five minutes for every month of age. A three-month-old should never be walked more than 15 minutes at a time. A nine-month-old can be safely walked for 45 minutes.

Free play in your fenced back yard is also important, but fragile puppies can't play with the bigger dogs. A bump during play can tear tendons. Playing with smaller, faster dogs is also out. A smaller dog can outturn your puppy. They'll be tempted to make that same turn and can injure themselves.

It's a frustrating first year for a wolfhound puppy, which means plenty of play with you those first 13 months. It's a great time to work on obedience in short sessions.

Also, puppies should never go up and down steps until the growth plates close. This means lifting them into and out of cars to avoid

damaging jars to those joints. Since they can top 100 pounds in six months, look into buying a folding ramp if you have an SUV or van, and train them with treats to use it. Start now. They'll be too heavy to lift in no time.

### **Destructo The Wonder Puppy.**

Especially while they're teething, wolfhound puppies can be terrors. You'll be surprised what those young jaws can crunch up. And will. Be careful with the chew toys you choose. What's indestructible to most puppies will last seconds with a wolfhound.

They explore their world with their mouths. And if it's in their mouth? They often swallow. And here's a real danger. Obstructed bowels. Blockages the owner had no idea were developing bite by bite until a rush to the vet for X-ray reveals dish towels, yards of lint, strands of plastic bags, sticks and god knows what else is stuck down in there. Expensive operations are often the only alternative to saving your puppy's life.

So, you'll learn to watch your young hound *like a hawk*. Telling your puppy to "leave it" from across the room doesn't cut it. While your puppy is awake, you'll be constantly hovering and wrestling odd objects out of their jaws. Did I mention wolfhounds are stubborn? And verrrry curious.

Rely on your breeder. Sleep with one eye open. Forget ever watching a complete movie, and kennel your puppy safely when you can't watch them. And relax. In just a mere 12 months or so, you'll have a juvenile wolfhound on your hands.

Better start brushing up on your rodeo skills now...